DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 066 CS 212 772

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TITLE Cross-Curricular Writing Instruction: Can Writing Instructors Resist Institutional Resistance?
PUB DATE Mar 91
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (42nd, Boston, MA, March 21-23, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Educational Research; Higher Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; Resistance to Change; Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Behavior; Teacher Improvement; Teacher Workshops; *Teaching Styles; Writing Across the Curriculum; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Writing to Learn

ABSTRACT

A case study of the responses of two faculty members to a seminar designed to help them use writing-across-the-curriculum in their classrooms was undertaken. The purpose of the seminar was to examine the positive and negative views of the concept of "resistance" to illuminate reasons for, and forms of, faculty resistance to change. The seminar participants used in the case study were both senior members of the faculty: one was a rhetorician and the other was a language philosopher. The rhetorician demonstrated assumptions on learning and teaching which were at odds with the objectives of the seminar. Yet while he initially resisted ideas about writing-to-learn, he has continued to scrutinize and revise his teaching to incorporate writing-to-learn into his teaching style in the semester after the seminar. The language philosopher, however, based his objections to using writing-to-learn on a perceived unbearable increase in his workload. The language philosopher discussed his teaching with the seminar leader only sporadically in the semester after the seminar and confessed at the end of the semester that he has not incorporated elements of the seminar into his teaching because of a perceived increase in workload. Findings suggest that seminar leaders need to collaborate with instructors as they revise their courses so as to be able to understand the sources and nature of resistance and to assist teachers who are serious about changing their pedagogy. (RS)

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by Jody Swilky

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Cross-Curricular Writing Instruction:
Can Writing Instructors Resist Institutional Resistance?

By Jody Swilky

Over the last decade, writing specialists have devoted considerable attention to defining resistance, and competing definitions emerge because of the different intentions of those who define this concept. When proponents of writing across the curriculum, for instance, speak about this concept, they usually identify institutional divisions, policies and practices, as well as faculty attitudes and beliefs, that represent obstacles to "postive" curricular change (Fulwiler and Young 289-93; McLeod 343; Russell 191). Resistance supports the status quo, and those who resist oppose meaningful change.

One limitation of this thinking is that it restricts our ability to understand the reasons for and nature of resistance, because it fails to perceive the possibility of productive opposition to reformers' attempts to influence others. While resistance can be a conscious or unconscious attempt to preserve the status quo, it also can represent a critical interrogation of the purposes of reform. To deny either possibility is to limit our ability to distinguish unproductive opposition to our arguments from productive response that questions the agendas we impose on others.

In the remainder of this presentation, I will consider positive and negative views of this concept to illuminate reasons for and forms of faculty resistance to change. I will base my analysis on my collaboration with faculty, in a summer seminar and over the

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ensuing semester, who supposedly intend to change their teaching by using writing to promote learning. I will focus on the writing and behavior of two faculty members who have similar interests and experience, yet who distinguish themselves through their ideological dispositions.

Writing before The Seminar

The seminar aims to expose participants to theoretical and practical literature so they can gain awareness of how students can learn course content and discursive practices, as well as reformulate their understanding, through writing. Moreover, we intend to discuss how students can participate more actively in the classroom. Before the seminar, participants respond to questions about themselves as writers and the writing they ask students to produce, and through these introductory statements, they suggest the degrees to which they support or oppose the seminar's objectives.

Robert, a rhetorician and senior member of the faculty, introduces himself by providing two responses: one focusing on himself as a writer, the other describing his teaching. When Robert discusses his own writing career, he inscribes himself in an exploratory mode:

> What scares me is not writing. For years I did not write because I had nothing to say. Today I write regularly.... How do I feel about this writing? I do not enjoy the act of writing this specific assignment-- it is a struggle, it is taking more time than I thought. What I have written is written in a computer, not in stone.

These statements suggest the conviction that writing is an activity through which we revise our thinking. When Robert discusses his

course, however, he reveals that his assumptions about writing do not apply to his use of writing in the classroom:

> Public speaking is discovering the best answer to a question of policy or value over which the truth or falsity can be argued, and locating and refuting the reasons that the audience is against the speaker's conclusion. Like dialectic, rhetoric is a method by which we arrive at truth. The public speaker is a participant in a process by which citizens arrive at good judgments.
>
> In the course, students write three manuscripts [of speeches] and two two-page papers. ... The manuscripts are graded on meeting the learning goals for the speech and on the standards of university level writing. Each of the two papers focuses on a specific concept in the course. Each student takes six papers and ranks them according to meeting the learning goals of the assignment and demonstrating university level writing.

Robert provides students with a list of "learning goals" and "standards of university level writing," which students apply when evaluating an oral presentation or ranking their peers' papers. While the class provides verbal feedback to speeches and students rank short papers, students neither revise speeches nor rewrite papers.

The way Robert uses writing, then, suggests that his assumptions are at odds with the objectives of the seminar. He closes his introductory statement with a series of questions, however, that suggest both the potential for positive and negative resistance: "Why are several short assignments better than a single paper?"; " Does peer feedback provide quality as well as quantity?"; and "What is university writing and how does one teach it?" Considering Robert's course description, his years of teaching experience, and his expertise in a form of language use, he may be challenging the "writing expert," a stance that suggests his potential resistance to change. At the same time, however, his inquiries may reflect his genuine interest in considering activities

he is aware of yet has not integrated into his teaching.

In contrast to the way Robert responds to my questions, Robin, a language philosopher and senior member of the faculty, integrates his analysis of his writing with his discussion of teaching:

> I start out to write a defense of Socrates, but end up with a personal paper relating my mounting climbing experiences to the simile of the cave by way of Wittgenstein.... Now the problem is whether this is an excuse for being unphilosophical or whether such an approach can only be made after one has established oneself.
>
> This is my dilemma with students as well. Are they inventive or sloppy, insightful or lucky, scholastic or Socratic? Perhaps that's why I have students keep notebooks which they turn in from time to time. The format for this writing is the problem, however. Should students copy a passage from the reading, interpret it, and relate their response to previous entries, or should I select a specific passage and have them follow "how-to-read-philosophy" guidelines?

Robin's response suggests his belief that composing is a process of producing new understanding, because "intention" changes through the process of writing itself. At the same time, however, he questions the value of exploration for students. Before finishing his introductory statement, Robin reveals a possible cause of his "dilemma." When explaining how he structures student writing, he indicates that students now follow a guide and write about a passsage selected for them, because "reading diverse responses and rereading earlier responses is just too much work." Moreover, he reads these notebooks "at midterm and at the end of the semester." His primary concern, then, is to manage the work load, and because of this priority, he may resist any change that requires more of his time and labor.

Writing for the Seminar

During the first two weeks of the seminar, participants read and write about articles concerned with theory and practice, becoming engaged with issues such as the purposes of schooling, writing in the disciplines, writing assignments, and response to student texts. Each day we discuss the readings and participants' writing, in small groups and as a seminar, focusing on the pertinence and irrelevance of the readings to participants' concerns and objectives.

Robert, the rhetorician, writes terse responses, highlighted by his quick dismissal of an argument and questions about issues that a particular argument ignores. Moreover, he consistently inquires about the university's freshman reading and writing course, particularly how instructors prepare students to write for other college courses. At his request, and with the approval of other participants,[1] we read articles relevant to the introductory writing course, which elicits this response from Robert:

> You offer me some theoretical mumbo jumbo. Perhaps I am a nuts-and-bolts teacher. You propose that it is possible for students to become more competent writers if they try to "discover" what they want to say. I am more interested in reasoned argument than exploration. What happens when students have neither anything to say nor the skills to write? What about mechanics and organization? Students in the classes I teach who have taken English 1 have problems. I have one final question: What can I expect of your students as writers after they complete English 1?

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1) Although reluctant to comply with Robert's request, I agreed. Our freshman reading and writing course is based on an epistemic pedagogy similar to the one David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky present in Ways of Reading. For this day, the seminar read Foucault's "Discourse on Language," Bartholomae's "Inventing the University," and Spellmeyer's "Foucault and the Freshman Writer." I also gave participants a description of our freshman course.

Robert's questions suggest assumptions about learning, teaching and institutional responsibilities that might cause him to resist change. Suspect of the freshman writing course's objectives, and critical of what students learn in this course, he appears to challenge the "writing expert," and may already wonder why he should listen to the recommendations proposed in this seminar. At the same time, however, his questions may represent an attempt to initiate a dialogue, his combative approach notwithstanding. Being a "nuts-and-bolts" teacher, as well as a rhetorican schooled in the classical tradition, he encounters "mumbo jumbo" that challenges his assumptions and priorities, and therefore questions this "new rhetoric." Robert considers himself a language expert and an accomplished teacher, subjectivities supported by his scholarship and institutional recognition, and he will not change his beliefs unless persuaded by "reasoned argument"-- what he expects of all orators-- that accounts for his concerns and priorities.

Robin, the language philosopher, produces a reponse to the readings that contrasts with Robert's. Exercising his penchant for play, he titles his response " Inventing 'Inventing the University' (while Waiting for Foucault)," alluding to the voice of Beckett, actually Molloy, that Foucault hears as he opens "The Discourse on Language." This playfulness disappears in the opening paragraph, as Robin begins to discuss academic language practices:

> The rules for successfully inventing the university reside in the hands of mostly white men who do not give others the secrets of successful invention. If the writing is white enough, it is deemed to be a proper copy of the Platonic form of the University. Now we all know about studies which show that blind referees cannot discern male writing from female writing. We also know that at times most blindfolded people peek.
>
> Bartholomae claims that all the student writers he

> knows are aware of [academic] conventions. This may be true, but it is already a selective group of mostly white men who have given permission to invent the university.... The guardians of academic language games decide whose inventions of the university are genuine and whose will never get a patent. I'm inclined to think that such talk about students " learning to speak our language, to speak as we do," is a way to exclude whomever we want under the guise of objective standards.

It appears, then, that this oppositional voice endorses the expansion of language use in the university. Robin constructs a critique of institutional power, however, without offering his own vision of academic literacy, which leads me to question the source of his opposition. Is his primary concern the effect of institutional power on students or on himself? When he refers to those individuals who will never receive a "patent" for their "inventions," is he speaking about students, teachers outside the mainstream, or both groups? And what about his suspicion of those "blind referees," who allegedly remove their blindfolds to ensure the preservation of the dominant discourse? Robin may illuminate the strategies for excluding or marginalizing students (and others), yet he offers no form of positive resistance that works against institutional conditions and practices.

Writing after the Seminar

When the seminar closes, teachers and I agree that we will communicate on a regular basis, so I can assist them with their assignments, responses to student writing, and any problems they encounter. We also agree that teachers and students will evaluate the uses and value of the writing activities, and I will visit classes.

Robin and I neither speak nor correspond about his philosophy

course until the fifth week of the semester, when he sends me his syllabus and promises to forward copies of student writing. It is not until the week before finals that I am allowed to visit his class and see student writing. In his course evaluation, Robin admits that he made no serious attempt to use writing to promote learning:

> I quickly let writing take a back seat to lecture, occasionally using it to initiate a class discussion. Although I intended to collect the writing every other week, I pushed it to the side because I felt I didn't have time for it. It wasn't until mid-semester that I read and responded to what students had written.... The notebook was extra work which was placed on top of an already existing course.

This assessment of performance reflects the resistance that Robin suggests in his earlier writing. Before the seminar, he is uncertain how to structure the ways students read and write, and his indecision can be partly, and perhaps substantially, attributed to his concern for managing the work load. Now he admits that he "quickly" ignores this "extra work," subordinating its purpose to his self interest. In theory, Robin may speak about learning through writing and the importance of expanding institutional language practices; yet in practice, he preserves the status quo.

My collaboration with Robert , the rhetorican, contrasts with my work with the language philosopher, primarily because Robert and I communicate frequently to discuss his ideas about his revised course. He initially modifies his course by asking students to rewrite their speech-texts, after they receive feedback from the class, and by requiring them to write "reflections" on what they learn from giving a specific speech. I suggest that Robert respond to the drafts of speech texts, but he rejects my recommendation. When I read drafts and revisions of speech-texts, I

observe that students are basically changing the surface features of their writing, and I explain that if Robert reponds to the content of early drafts, students might produce more substantive revisions. In response to my suggestion, he writes:

> Your point about responding to manuscripts before rewrites is well taken. Students aren't rewriting content. I'll try reading and responding to their manuscripts. You're trying to turn me into a liberal.

That Robert resists and eventually adopts my idea suggests that his initial opposition to change stems from his ingrained belief about learning, which now, after our discussion, is being tested by his repositioning himself in the learning process. Throughout the semester, he scrutinizes and revises his teaching, and such behavior is described in his course evaluation:

> I required students to write so they could become more proficient as public speakers and more knowledgeable about public speaking.
>
> I modified my original plan to allow for revision, first by requiring rewrites and then by helping students with their revisions. What I have discovered, however, is that not much change occurs through rewriting. Perhaps I am partly responsible for the results of this experiment, because my commentary may not have given students specific reasons for revising.
>
> I believe the reflections on oratory have worked. For the final assignment, I asked students to read their first reflections and write about how their thinking has changed. On the whole, students reformulated their thinking.... Next semester, I will require students to reflect on present and past performances throughout the course.

Robert's evaluation reveals both positive and negative resistance. On the one hand, he experiments with and scrutinizes my ideas, which results in his employing revision for his own purposes-- to have students reformulate their ideas in their "reflections." On the other hand, he has not entirely changed his assumptions about learning, and therefore resists modifying the way he responds to student texts. Throughout the semester, he provides students with

directives, such as "explain this subpoint" or "provide support," despite our discussions concerning ways to ask specific questions that give students "reasons" for expanding and/or rethinking their writing. This resistance to change works against his goal of assisting students as they attempt to reformulate their understanding of oratory.

Resisting Resistance

One inference that I draw from this analysis of my colleagues and their writing is that to understand the sources and nature of resistance, and to assist teachers who are serious about changing their pedagogy, we need to collaborate with instructors as they revise their courses. The short workshop and extended seminar have serious limitations as means of effecting change, in part because teachers are frequently responding to novel, complex ideas; in part because we can misread the reasons for and the nature of their responses; and in part because genuine pedagogical transformation requires the implementing and testing of ideas and strategies in the classroom. When we work with teachers as they revise and scrutinize their teaching--if they elect to do so--, we attain fuller understanding of their ideology and resistance, and with this knowledge, we can work more effectively to encourage different levels of transformation.

I consider this dialogue a way to resist resistance, not a sure means of effecting change. It requires that we enter the discourses that shape others without abandoning our convictions about language, learning and education. Moreover, it calls for our colleagues to remain open to what we say and to appropriate what they determine

meaningful to their purposes. These conversations require compromise and produce tension, yet such exchanges are inevitable when we cross disciplinary divisions and promote our ideas.

One reason that I argue for this form of dialogue is because of what writing specialists report when they describe their attempts to make a pedagogical transition. Frequently, they underscore their frustrations-- their problems with, say, designing assignments and revising how they respond to student texts. It is not uncommon for these teachers to claim that the complications they encounter don't disappear in a semester or even a year. Moreover, they often speak of the need to converse with others who have experienced this change. I find it difficult to believe that disciplinary instructors who attend a workshop or seminar don't encounter the same, or more serious complications when they return to the classroom.

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